

Strategic Implications of the USFK Relocation to Pyeongtaek

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On 11 July 2017, the Eighth United States Army (EUSA) in the Republic of Korea (ROK) held a ribbon cutting ceremony to commemorate the relocation of its headquarters to Pyeongtaek, marking the end of its 64-year Yongsan era. The opening of the U.S. Army garrison in Pyeongtaek signifies a new chapter in the history of the United States Forces Korea (USFK). More than just a physical relocation, the movement to Pyeongtaek also affords groundbreaking improvements in deterrence against North Korea and defensive capabilities. Although there is still work to be done, the garrison at Pyeongtaek is expected to evolve into a whole new type of integrated overseas garrison for the United States Forces in the 21st century.

Relocation Process and Objectives

During the bilateral summit in May 2003, the ROK and the U.S. agreed to relocate all the United States Forces military installations in Yongsan including the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC) and the United Nations Command (UNC) to Pyeongtaek and Osan. Per this agreement, the two states concluded the Yongsan Relocation Plan (YRP) in 2004 to begin the relocation process. Although the initial plan was to complete the relocation by 2008, the project saw multiple delays due to insufficient construction time and delays in purchasing the real

estate in Pyeongtaek. In 2014, the ROK and the U.S. amended the original plan to allow the CFC to remain in Yongsan until the wartime operational control (OPCON) of the armed forces is fully transferred to the ROK. After many twists and turns, EUSA finally completed relocating its main body in June 2017. The 2nd Infantry Division (2ID) is also scheduled to complete its relocation to Pyeongtaek by 2018.

The relocation was prompted by the argument that the presence of the Yongsan Garrison in the heart of Seoul stifled urban development and led to a friction with the local populace, stirring complaints among the community. In addition, the inefficiency of having United States Forces scattered across the country in the aftermath of the Korean War in 1953 was another important factor for consideration. Prior to the relocation program, the U.S. military bases in South Korea were located in 91 areas, covering an area equivalent to approximately 240 million square meters. The relocation program seeks to enhance the efficiency of United States Forces by consolidating the 170-some U.S. military bases and facilities across the country to the central hub (Pyeongtaek and Osan) and southern hub (Daegu, Waegwan, and Gimcheon). In the same vein, the consolidation of the U.S. military bases and facilities allows the ROK Government to develop its lands from a more comprehensive perspective. The U.S. Army garrison in Pyeongtaek is dubbed Camp Humphreys, named after Chief Warrant Officer Benjamin K. Humphreys, a pilot who died in a helicopter accident during a mission in 1962.

Size and Characteristics of Camp Humphreys

The ROK and the U.S. spent a total of KRW 17 trillion to construct Camp Humphreys. The United States Forces manages this mega ~~giant~~ integrated complex as a special zone. Spanning across 14.48^{km²}, Camp Humphreys is the largest U.S. military base outside the United States. The land purchased for expanding the base was about double the area of the previous base. The U.S. military units from other regions, such as EUSA from Yongsan, will converge in Camp Humphreys. There are 513 buildings in Camp Humphreys including the command headquarters buildings for EUSA and USFK. Also present are an airfield and runway for various helicopters and cargo planes, barracks, dependents housing, school, hospital, gyms, restaurants, and even a golf course. A railway connects the base to Seoul. Camp Humphreys is also located in the vicinity of the United States Air Force (USAF) Osan Air Base (Osan AB) and Pyeongtaek Harbor, one of the country's main harbors with the depth of 17 meter allowing for even LNG

vessels to berth.

Strategic Significance

The greatest utility of Camp Humphreys comes from the seamless employment of joint forces during contingencies thanks to the collocation of ground, naval, and air forces' installations. 2ID, the USFK's main ground force, will be residing in Camp Humphreys. Osan AB, the main house of the USFK's air component, is only 20km away readily available to provide air power. Pyeongtaek Harbor is also within a 20km radius of Camp Humphreys. Garrison designs include plans to connect the base with Pyeongtaek Harbor via rail. U.S. Forces are currently laying railway tracks to connect the 11km segment between Camp Humphreys and Pyeongtaek Station.

All this means that rapid projection and deployment of joint forces will be possible during contingencies. Troops and supplies from the U.S. bases and stations in Okinawa can arrive via Pyeongtaek Harbor within 24 hours if they are transported on High Speed Vessels (HSV). By air, airlift workhorse C-17 cargo aircraft can reach the base via the airstrip of Camp Humphreys, again enabling rapid projection of troops and equipment. In case of contingencies on the Korean Peninsula, Camp Humphreys would enable the rapid deployment of augmenting U.S. Forces to the ROK and their expeditious projection to the forward area. Moreover, as the USFK continues to consolidate its bases and facilities across the country to Camp Humphreys, its force employment will become more efficient. Consolidation of bases and facilities will allow for more rapid and integrated operations.

Another benefit to Camp Humphreys is that it allows the USFK to better prioritize its operations, thereby enhancing the flexibility of its force employment. Although the rising tensions from the North Korean threat means that the 210th Artillery Brigade has to remain along the front, the relocation to the rear area ensures basic survival for the majority of the USFK. As such, the USFK will have the sufficient conditions for employing its forces in accordance with the priorities mandated by the threat.

Integrating forces with Pyeongtaek at the core could also improve the efficiency of command and control (C2). As Camp Humphreys is outfitted with cutting edge tactical C4I (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence) systems, it will allow for enhanced operations performance. Force protection measures have also become more efficient.

The Patriot battery will help defend the garrison as a vital point defense asset. The U.S. Forces are also planning to deploy additional PAC-3 in the base.

Therefore, the USFK's relocation to Pyeongtaek would strengthen the ROK-U.S. Alliance's ability to deter North Korean threats. This is because the relocation will enable a rapid force flow into the peninsula during contingencies, which plays a key role in the ROK-U.S. combined defense system. Also, the consolidation of units at Pyeongtaek will expand military utility and flexibility. Sensing such advantages the relocation would provide, North Korea strongly condemned the relocation on 14 July 2017 through a statement released by its Panmunjom Representative Office. In the statement, North Korea threatened that Pyeongtaek is "our military's foremost strike target." Such strong response from North Korea indicates that North Korea perceives Camp Humphreys as a grave threat. It can thus be inferred that Camp Humphreys is an important asset for the ROK-U.S. Alliance to deter and respond to North Korean threats.

In particular, as hinted in North Korea's threats saying "the bigger the base of the America Imperialist invasion forces, the greater the effect our army's fires will have against the target," North Korea feels threatened by the sheer scale of Camp Humphreys that will allow for integrated employment of joint forces. Having argued for the withdrawal of the USFK for years, North Korea is now proportionately opposed to Camp Humphreys for its stabilizing effect on continued USFK presence. Such concerns can be seen in North Korea's criticism of Camp Humphreys as "America's coercive attempt at permanent presence on the Korean Peninsula."

Camp Humphreys would also serve as the United States' military hub or staging base in Northeast Asia. The garrison's vicinity to sea and air ports would allow the United States to use Camp Humphreys to stage the projection of its forces in the region. U.S. Forces from the continental United States as well as across the globe could potentially deploy in the region via Pyeongtaek. The United States could also use the USFK garrison as a military hub. As released in the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), the relocation to Pyeongtaek signifies USFK's transition from being "forward deployed" to "forward stationed." A Forward stationed status allows dependents to co-reside with the service members, and is usually applied to hub-level bases. The USFK could reinforce its forces at Camp Humphreys for projection within and beyond the region.

As a civil-military integrated town, Camp Humphreys could become the next new model

for the overseas stationing of US forces. Among the 28,000 USFK troops, a significant number are expected to take their families with them to Pyeongtaek. This means Pyeongtaek may see a population bump of 45,000 to 60,000 people. This will also mark the first time that a mass number of U.S. service members, dependents, and ROK citizens are cohabiting in the same area. Based on mutual understanding and seamless coordination, the new arrangement could not only further improve the ROK-U.S. relations but also set an example for integrated overseas garrisons of the 21st century.

Future Considerations and Way Ahead

Although the relocation to Camp Humphreys clearly increases strategic efficiency for the ROK-U.S. Alliance, there remain a few tasks that must be resolved. Since Camp Humphreys will serve not only as a military hub in Northeast Asia but also set the condition for "strategic flexibility" that would allow commitment of forces in regional conflict, potential tensions with China may be inevitable. The United States has been evolving its military presence in Asia to keep China in check in accordance with its plans from 2004 for relocation of its forces stationed overseas and the Obama Administration's Rebalancing to Asia Strategy. In particular, Pyeongtaek's unrivaled proximity to China and the geographical advantage it provides for keeping China's fleets cordoned off from the Pacific lead some to consider Camp Humphreys as the world's largest outpost against China. China was greatly wary of the potential deployment of THAAD to Pyeongtaek when it was decided in 2015 that a THAAD battery would deploy in the ROK. During his attendance at the Nuclear Non-proliferation International Conference, Professor Wu Riqiang of the Renmin University argued that deploying THAAD to Camp Humphreys would enable the United States to spy on China's key military installations and missiles.

As such, the ROK and the U.S. could learn a lesson from the THAAD example and make it clear that the purpose of Camp Humphreys is not to encircle or keep tabs on China. It is vital to make China aware of the fact that the expansion of Camp Humphreys was planned 15 years ago in 2003 for the purpose of consolidating USFK bases and facilities to enhance efficiency in deterrence and response to North Korea, and of moving USFK military installations out of Seoul. Although Camp Humphreys could indeed be utilized as a hub or a staging base, it is necessary to explain that the garrison would not be used for the purpose of military confrontation as long as China does not use its military preemptively. Avoiding the deployment of

U.S. strategic assets to Pyeongtaek may also be worthy of consideration given China's sensitivity regarding the option. What is most important is that the purpose of the ROK-U.S. Alliance and its way ahead are specified to clearly reaffirm that the ROK-U.S. Alliance is a mechanism to ensure peace in the region.

The force protection system at Camp Humphreys also needs to be reinforced. As North Korea continues to upgrade the performance and precision of its 300mm Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS), Camp Humphreys remains within range of those artillery pieces and thus must develop more robust countermeasures. There is also the issue of environmental pollution inspection and the question of cleanup responsibility as the USFK finalizes its move out of Yongsan. In addition, as the relocation shifts the balance of the ROK-U.S. forces, efforts should be made to bring stability to the new balance of forces and the intelligence sharing system.

In conclusion, Camp Humphreys provides an important opportunity and means of upgrading the ROK-U.S. Alliance to the next level. In particular, in a situation like the present when tensions due to North Korea's threats could not be higher, it is vital to enhance the USFK's efficiency, flexibility, and response capability. The ROK and the U.S. will have to continue to work together to assuage the concerns of its neighbors while developing Camp Humphreys as planned so that it can contribute further to the peace on the Korean Peninsula.